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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

15 JAN 1964

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: Response to Query Concerning U-2 Overflight Policy.

1. There is a possibility that during some future press conference you may be queried concerning your policy with regard to U-2 overflights of the Soviet Union. The probability of this issue being raised would be heightened by any incident which would again focus news media attention on the U-2, but even in the absence of such an incident it is considered prudent that some thought be given in advance to the wording of a response which would afford the least inhibition to future intelligence collection activities deemed essential to national security.
2. Because of its pertinence there is attached the verbatim exchange between President Kennedy and newsmen at his press conference of 25 January 1961. It should be noted that, contrary to popular assumption, President Kennedy did not make any pledge or give any assurance, at least publicly, that there would be no further overflights. He limited his response to a statement that he had ordered that the flights not be resumed. An order, obviously, is valid only until countermanded.
3. In light of the foregoing, it is recommended that if this issue is raised your response include a reference to President Kennedy's previous statement and an affirmation that the order he described is still in effect. The following wording is suggested for your consideration:

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"As you are all aware, President Kennedy at his news conference on 25 January 1961, stated that he had ordered that such flights not be resumed. That order has never been countermanded and so far as I am concerned is still in effect."

If the questioner should pursue the matter by asking under what conditions might the order be countermanded and such flights resumed, the following response is suggested.

"I think it would be highly inappropriate for me to speculate on any such purely hypothetical future situation."

(Signed) JOHN A. McCONE

JOHN A. McCONE
Director

Attachment - 1
Verbatim Transcript [redacted]

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Signature Recommended:

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VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT

(Note: The line of questioning being followed concerns the two RB-47 officers whose release by the Russians was announced at the opening of the press conference.)

Question: "Does that mean, Sir, that they accepted a reassurance of no-more-overflights as an exchange?"

Answer: "It is a fact that I have ordered that the flights not be resumed, which is a continuation of the order given by President Eisenhower in May of last year."

The transcript also records, at another point in the conference, the following question and answer:

Question: "This RB-47 was claimed by the Russians as an overflight, although we took a different position. In the light of the announcement, what will be your general policy on overflights and on such things as the U-2 flights? Do you conceive of circumstances which might warrant resumption of such things as the U-2 flights?"

Answer: "The Soviet Government is fully aware of the United States Government's views with respect to the distinction between the question of the United States Air Force RB-47 and the incident which occurred over Soviet territory on May 1, 1960 involving an American U-2 type aircraft. Flights of American aircraft penetrating the airspace of the Soviet Union have been suspended since May, 1960. I have ordered that they not be resumed."

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